I prodigious Hindu civilization" (2).
L
174 2. Ibid.
101

/11/ We should not, however, conclude from these premises that the Annamitic Chain has always constituted an insurmountable barrier and that these two worlds which are so dissimilar never communicated with one another. On the contrary, they had quite frequent and extremely violent encounters which partially explain the kind of Tower of Babel which the basin of the Mékong forms today.

"Long ago," as J. Moura has judiciously written in his Royaume du Cambodge, "Indo-China was the closed field where the civilizations of India and China and doubtless too those of the peoples of central Asia came to try themselves and do battle with one another. These Mongol and Tibetan migrations must have occurred before the Christian era and must correspond to the time when internal wars devastated these regions and resulted in an overflow of the peoples of the North towards the Occident, the Orient, and probably too towards the South. In resume, it may be said that Indo-China was once the theater of political struggles, the land of confusion of religious ideas and mixture of races. The difficulties which we have encountered in all our studies, in seeking a solution to the problems relative to this region, have no other cause."

I /12/ Which was the truly aboriginal race in Laos? No one can
L say, and at the very most all we can do is to suggest the hypothesis
172 that the first inhabitants must have settled there at a time when present-day Indo-China did not yet exist, geologically speaking, and when a relatively large part of the Asiatic lands was covered by water. The interesting collections obtained in Luang-Prabang by Massie and Lefèvre-Pontalis in the course of their explorations in behalf of the Pavie missions show us instruments and weapons of the Polished Stone Age and the Bronze Age. "There existed, therefore, during this prehistoric epoch in the basin of the northern Mékong, human beings who had the same way of life, the same tools and the same methods of work as our own ancestors in old Gaul" (1). This

1. Cf. L. de Reinach, op. cit. /Le Laos, 1911/

period, however, must have lasted much longer in the peninsula than in Europe, if we are to believe the "Imperial Annals of Annam" according to which bronze was still in use in the second century B.C.

I in northern Indo-China, whose inhabitants were obliged to have re-
L course to /13/ China in order to obtain iron farming implements.
172 According to the discoveries of Indo-Chinese geologists and the learned studies of Dr. Verneau (1), these primitive populations

I
L 1. Cf. R. Verneau, Les récentes découvertes prehistoriques
174 de l'Indochine (comptes rendus de l'Académie des
162 Sciences, 1924). -- H. Mansuy, Contribution à l'étude de
144 la préhistoire de l'Indochine, 1923-1925. -- E. Patte, Notes sur le préhistorique indochinois, 1925.

presented the same characteristics as may still be found "in the islands of Malaysia, from Sumatra to the center of Borneo, among the tribes which constitute the Indonesian group." Today they are known as Kha in Laotian lands, as Moï in Annam and as Pnong in Cambodia. Among these Khas, "There are unquestionably various types. In some of them we recognize without any difficulty the influence of Mongol blood which has modified the characteristics of the primitive race in varying degrees. But if we eliminate these half-breeds who are more or less impregnated with yellow blood, we are left with dolichocephalic, hypsicephalic individuals with pentagonal heads... who closely resemble the old race which once lived on the frontiers of China. It is therefore becoming increasingly probable that the Indonesians and the Khas are both descended from a stock which used to live /14/ in the north of the Indo-Chinese peninsula"(1).

1. R. Verneau, Les crânes humains du gisement préhistorique de Pho-Binh-Gia. -- L'Antropologie, pp. 558-559. Quoted by H. Mansuy in the Mémoires du Service géologique de l'Indochine. Vol. XII, fascicule II, 1925, vi, p. 9.

I From the state of his knowledge on the Indo-Chinese Neolithic
L period in 1925, H. Mansuy has concluded: "These Indonesians
174 form a group of remarkable homogeneity whenever they are not impregnated with the blood of the genuinely Mongoloid races in the midst of which they are disseminated... Through their cranial morphology and their short faces, they are linked to the disharmonic dolichocephalics of the end of the Pleistocene and to the Cro-Magnon type... The real similarity between the men of the last phase of the Pleistocene in Europe and the Indonesian group which

is today scattered throughout the Far East and Malaysia makes it possible to consider this hypothesis. We know that the present-day Indonesians preceded -- both in the southwest of the Asian continent and in Indonesia -- the arrival of populations bearing Mongoloid characteristics, such as the Chinese, Thaïs, Muongs, Mans, Annamites, Malays, etc., and that wherever these yellow populations have penetrated and settled the Indonesians have been dispossessed of the greater /15/ part of the territories which they originally occupied and have been forced back into remote and inaccessible regions where they still live today. These classical facts, of an ethnic, demographic and geographical order, agree with the results of the first methodical research by prehistoric anthropologists in Southeast Asia."

I L 174

It is therefore to be presumed that the first inhabitants of Laos had only very rudimentary tools and weapons at their disposition, that they lived in complete independence, that their evolution was excessively slow and that they underwent "contact with, the imprint of, and then the yoke of more intelligent and better armed neighbors who had a broader and less individual social organization." Thence arose crossings, metamorphoses, transformations and an intermingling of individuals which subsequently gave birth to intermediate sub-races and to distinct groups the characteristics or even the numbers of which are difficult to determine today, and whose present-day representatives, clinging to the sides of the mountains, "embody before our eyes the traditional type of the savage" with their swarthy skins, their straight noses, their non-slitted eyes, their huts, their arrows and their dialects which are "evidently /16/ related to the Malayo-Polynesian idioms" (1).

1. Cf. E. Chassigneux, Géographie physique, the first chapter of the "Indochine" published in 1929 under the direction of G. Maspero.

I L 172 ● 114

Who, then, were the first invaders? In the absence of any vestiges which can be attributed to a period antedating the beginning of the Christian era, the answer to this question is still more difficult than the question of the first occupants. Formless ruins (or ruins of which it is usually impossible to determine the use, such as the "jars" of Tran-Ninh), crumbling statues and a few fragments of steles buried in the thick undergrowth -- such

I are the sole documents which have so far presented themselves to
L the sagacity of rare seekers who are charmed and disturbed by the
172 very mystery which enveloped them. In vain did the imagination --
114 and sometimes the picturesque imagination -- of a few Frenchmen among the first men who explored the country in the steps of Auguste Pavie, endeavor to use Laotian folklore to establish a kind of chronological classification of the races which successively populated the basin of the Mékong before the formation of the historically reconstructed political groupings. We cannot, without the risk of grave error, follow them in /17/ their hazardous hypotheses, the complete fragility of which has been demonstrated by the subsequent work of more expert historians (1).

I 1. Here nevertheless, as a curiosity, is the summary of the
L hypothesis formed by Dr. Lefèvre in the stimulating Ap-
174 pendix to his Voyage au Laos (Paris, Plon, 1898):
114

1. The first inhabitants of the peninsula, and the true aboriginals, were the Khas, an almost savage people without monuments and, so to speak, without any writing, who were driven back into the mountains by the successive invaders of their territory;

2. The Malays or Chams were the first colonists to come to Indo-China. They gradually succeeded in forming several principalities, the most important of which was the kingdom of Champa, comprising the whole coast from Tourane to Baria. A second Cham kingdom was founded in the basin of the Nam-Moun about 543 B.C.;

3. A century later there arrived 12,000 Brahmans coming from Benares with their leader Pra-Tong, the son of a king of Delhi. They struggled with the Chams, who were driven out of the basin of the Nam-Moun and came and founded the kingdom of Champassac (Bassac) whose capital was... Ventiane! (sic, p. 285). The Brahmans were the first ancestors of the Cambodians. They organized the conquered territory on the Hindu system and gave it the name of Krung (kingdom) Inthapat (of Indra). They founded Inthapataboury, the capital, to the south of the Dangrek, Saniaboury (Xania, victory; boury, city), Sakon-Lakon (Salaka, peace), Batanaboury (precious stones) and Souvanapoum (city of gold);

4. Under Açoka, emperor of "Burma" /"Birmanie"/

When he returned to his States, Setthathirath endeavored to win over permanently to his cause the chieftains of Lakhone, Xieng-Khong, Xieng-Hai, /80/ Muong-Pray and Muong-Nan who had not supported Bureng-Naung, and when he was sure of their support he advanced as far as Xieng-Sen. But there he soon learned that the governor of Xieng-Hai had been taken prisoner by the Burmese and that his sister Nang-Kalay had been treacherously abducted. In spite of his anger, he judged it prudent to withdraw in the company of his allies, who left their governments in the hands of Bureng-Naung's lieutenants. 726 643* 648* 175*

Treaty of alliance with Ayuthya (1560). In order to oppose the common danger, he took the first steps towards reconciliation with the king of Ayuthya, to whom he proposed a treaty of alliance. The Siamese, who were rebuilding the ruins of their capital with courage but not without disquietude, joyfully accepted and their prince gave one of his daughters to Setthathirath. A frontier pyramid was built on the watershed between the basin of the Mekong and that of the river of Nan which flows down to the Ménam. Solemnly surrounded by their courts, the two kings swore reciprocal friendship and assistance: "May the ties that bind us be prolonged from father to son down to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren; may quarrels be unknown between us and peace continue to reign /An unpaged photograph is inserted between pp. 80 and 81: "The That-Luong at Vientiane. "--Translator/ /81/ until the day when the sun and the moon fall to the surface of the earth" (1). 728 643* 648* 175*

1. Cf. Lefevre-Pontalis, La lutte des Thaïs contre les Birmans au seizieme siecle.

Vientiane, capital of Lan-Xang (1563). In order to avoid any surprise by the common enemy as well as to maintain the connection with Ayuthya, Setthathirath left Luang-Prabang permanently and transferred the capital of Lan-Xang to Vientiane. 643* 648* 175*

He was the true founder of this city which owes to him the splendor with which it shone during all of the seventeenth century and part of the eighteenth. He first surrounded it with solid bastion fortifications (2), then in the center near the river built the 633 643* 175* 172

2. From the vestiges which still remained around 1900 before the canal was dug and the circular boulevard laid out, /712/

633 Lunet de la Jonquiere has deduced that the ramparts of
643• Vientiane were composed of brick walls from four to six
175• meters in height with an earth banquette inside. They in-
172 cluded three sections, the salients of which were provided
/712/ with circular forts about eight meters high. Two gates which were fortified and crowned with spearhead ornaments gave entrance to the second section, one on the east towards the That-Luong, and the other on the west at the exit of the present Luang-Prabang road.

royal palace in the pagoda of which the emerald Buddha (Pra-Keo), the sign of power and command /82/ which he had brought from Xieng-Mai in 1548 (1), was placed.

/778/ 1. The emerald Buddha was in reality cut from a block of green jasper. The Siamese were to capture it in 1778 and take it to Bangkok, of which it became the tutelary divinity and where the sumptuous temple which rises today in the first court of the royal palace was built for it in 1785.

172 Of the eighty some pagodas which Vientiane was to boast, the
633 Wat Pra-Keo was assuredly one of the greatest and most beautiful.
175• "The trees which veil it (today), the lianas which tie it to the columns and spread a mysterious shadow over its ruins make the visitor feel something of what the soul of the ancients felt on the threshold of a sacred wood. Brick openwork forms the enclosure and monumental staircases lead to the parvis. A dragon writhes on the ramps and raises its menacing head in a last coil. The columns of the gallery are graceful, tall, slender and without a base, but end in a capital of long, sharp leaves which fold outwards and look as though they were raised by the weight which they bear..." (2).

2. De Carne, op. cit. /Voyage en Indochine et dans l'Empire chinois. Paris, 1872./

175• The sanctuary was built on a terrace with three levels. The facade
172 opened onto a monumental portico whose three gateways and side
346 windows were richly framed /83/ /Page 83 is devoted to an illustra-
532 tion: "Ruins of the Pra-Keo at Vientiane"--Translator./ /84/ with many-colored sculptures. The whole edifice was entirely gilded on the outside.

The roof, the greater part of which still existed when Pavie went to Vientiane, has since collapsed and the two colossal statues of Buddha which sit on the abandoned altar remain exposed to the elements. Even as it is this grandiose ruin is wonderfully allied to the natural vegetation which holds it in its grasp and one cannot, without some emotion, evoke before it the past splendor of the kingdom of Lan-Xang. 175* 172 346 532

But the capital accomplishment of Setthitharath is the That-Luong, located about two kilometers away from the city. It is doubtless also the masterpiece of this Laotian architecture which has no powers of endurance but which cannot be denied grace and elegance. Miraculously spared by the Siamese at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the That-Luong was overthrown in 1873 by the Yunnanese pirates and partly restored, in rather a clumsy manner, in 1897-1898. /341/

This pyramidal edifice, called the "plume of the world" by its founder, was the "reliquary of the kingdom" and is still a highly frequented center of pilgrimage. A stele commemorating its erection bears /85/ the date 1566, and according to legend the original that was built about the eleventh century on one of Buddha's hairs.

The first enclosure, which has today crumbled away, is almost confused with the large group of ruined temples which surrounds it. It was formed by an open cloister which was colored with frescoes and in which the faithful and the priests assembled. The second enclosure is formed by a ledge along which runs a garland of bulging ornaments. "One would be tempted to call them the petals of a gigantic lotus bloom on the point of opening. Heavy pedestals covered with inscriptions support thirty-four slender pinnacles. Leaning on these pedestals as on buttresses, the mass on which the pyramid is set begins to deploy its curves and the pyramid itself springs from a sheaf of broad leaves, like the stem of a plant. . . . It once sparkled with gold applied on a lead base, shreds of which can still be seen" (1).

1. De Carne, ibid. /Voyage en Indochine et dans l'Empire chinois. Paris, 1872./, quoted by Aymonier, Voyage dans le Laos. See below, Laotian Architecture, p. 124.

First Burmese invasion (1563-1565). Solidly entrenched in his new capital, Setthathirath waited to see what the turn of events would be. /86/ He did not have long to wait, for Bureng-Naung 643* 648* 726 175*

they at least preserved their individuality and the prerogatives of their government. 648* 175*

/98/ Xieng-Khouang, the capital, was then a large and beautiful city whose numerous inhabitants were protected by an enclosure of deep moats and by forts which crowned the surrounding hillocks. The immense stone jars scattered pell-mell over its plain in the time when the Khas dominated the region (1) and "the wealth of 633 175* 172

1. Legend has it that these jars were constructed by the aboriginal Khas. For what purpose? -- A mystery. They may originally have been storehouses which served to shelter provisions on a road which has been frequented in all periods by migrating peoples. Perhaps rather they were designed to collect rainwater. Perhaps, finally, these monumental vases were simply mausoleums in which offerings were piled up to the shades of the dead. /415/

its sixty-two pagodas and of its shining Thats whose sides concealed treasures" had given it a renown which went far abroad.

Friendly relations were therefore resumed, as in the past, between the two States. Lan-Xang was again preparing to live in peace in its rediscovered autonomy when Nokeo-Koumane died while still very young and without leaving any survivors, in 1596 after a five years' reign. 648* 643* 175*

THAMMIKARATH (1582), KING 1596-1622.

New disorders were to be feared, /99/ /Page 99 is devoted to an illustration: "Tran-Ninh. The Plain of the Jars."--Translator/ /100/ and new competitions for the throne. Such was not the case, for the moment, thanks to the authority of Vongsa, a cousin by marriage of the dead king, who although was only fourteen years old was able to rally the suffrage of the court to his name. His mother was a sister of Setthathirath's last wife. The dynastic link was thus rather tenuous and the local chronicles do not fail to point out that on this date the power passed to the "junior" branch of the Khoun-Lo succession. 643* 175*

Vongsa reigned under the name of Thammikarath. In 1598 a son Oupagnouvarath was born to him, who had scarcely reached man's age when he developed a keen interest in the administration of his country. By virtue of his intelligence and his precocious maturity of mind he soon acquired a genuine popularity both among 557 643* 175*

115: Le Boulanger--65 _ H-4 (no date) 1931 AM1 Indochina
(1300-1700) Laotians AM8

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Fig. 7 Tran-Ninh. The Plain of the Jars.

/Facing p. 98/

545 and a barb of satire are mingled with the ancient traditions."
/177/ (L. de Reinach, op. cit. /Le Laos, posthumous edition, Paris, 1911/, p. 191.)

341 The other arts: architecture. Carefree artists: this is what the
346 Laotians seem to have been throughout the ages. And this is what
172 explains the extreme fragility of the innumerable monuments with which they adorned their land and which the pitiless tropical vegetation is today strangling for the most part. Under the Kmer influence
/177/ in the south and the Burmese in /125/ the north they built temples, chapels, pagoda-libraries, and reliquaries in the shape of "lotus blossoms" or pyramids or cones which were without any originality of their own but almost always charming in the grace, prettiness and elegance of their details. The reigning princes, from Fa-Ngoun to Souligna, were all great builders of temples, but if we except three or four edifices in Luang-Prabang, a few pagodas and chapels, the That-Luong in Vientiane and the Vat Sisaket which is only a century old, practically nothing is left of this abundant flowering (1).

1. There can be no question here of the important monastery of Vat-Phou (Bassac), which is really Kmer and belongs in some way to the Angkor group.

Everywhere in Laos one encounters impressive ruins of brick pagodas which were clumsily built but in which the plaster which covered them still frames the openings with many-colored ornaments and exquisite arabesques. For several years the French have tried, albeit somewhat tardily, to save the chief of these mutilated vestiges of an Edenic past from total destruction. Even the Vat Prakeo itself is today, alas! irrevocably destined to final disintegration.

"More fragile still (was) the style of building /126/ in wood which may well have yielded the most beautiful of the country's achievements. One of the most interesting of these exists today only in the memory which was recorded by a drawing of Delaporte at the time of the expedition of Doudart de Lagree... This was a pagoda located in the vicinity of Luang-Prabang... its form was highly individual, and reminds one of a feeding trough or a bread-pan. Delaporte compares it to an Oriental tomb. Rectangular in shape, its walls flared out up to the first roof. The latter was surmounted by a second recessed story which flared out again to support a second richly ornamented roof..."

115: Le Boulanger--81 H-4 (no date) 1931 (1300-1700) AM1 Indochina Laotians AM8

"The wooden panels which formed the walls, the corbels, and the beams were all carved with great delicacy. This pagoda was as pretty in the fineness of its details as it was elegant in its general lines. 341 346 172

"But nothing is left of it" (1).

1. Cf. G. Maspero, L'Indochine /Un empire colonial francais: l'Indochine. Paris, 1929-1930/, p. 186.

Sculpture. For these sanctuaries, the Laotians made hordes of statues out of stone, brick, and especially bronze, which were wholly or partly covered with gold. Of the latter, which were always molded from wax models, some attained gigantic size. /127/ All of them strike the various attitudes of the Buddhist liturgy. The bodies are sketchily draped and may be seated, standing, walking or lying down, their arms outspread. The faces are surmounted by a sort of tiara and are frozen in a hieratic smile which is not very expressive and seldom varies. 532 175*

Painting. As for the fresco paintings which brighten the walls of certain pagodas, they are not of any special interest. Most of them were "primarily the work of Burmese, Cambodians or Chinese of whom the native artists (were only) the pupils" (1). /177/

1. Cf. L. de Reinach, op. cit. /Le Laos, posthumous edition, Paris, 1911/, p. 342.

The art of the gold and silver smith. On the other hand, the Laotian jewelers and silversmiths knew and still know, with only the most meager of tools, how to work gold and silver admirably--primarily silver--and how to chase and engrave it. Their motifs show an attractive decorative invention, and it is chiefly in this "minor art" which borders on small-scale industry that we find the most original manifestations of old-time Laotian life /128/ -- betel services, vases, cups, sword and dagger hilts; bracelets, necklaces, rings, headpins, earrings, etc. 326

Basketwork and weaving. Finally, "like all the peoples of the Far East, the Laotians are skilled in all kinds of basketwork. A very pretty object which seems to be peculiar to this land is the small basket for women in which the basketwork is covered with 285 531

been the vassal of Annam and used to pay a triennial tribute. The Tayson revolt forced it to submit to the Siamese, who are mistreating the people. Today, seeing the glory and power of Emperor Gia-Long, the prince of Vientiane asks to serve Annam once again and to pay tribute as in the past.' The embassy was received in a solemn audience by Gia-Long, who questioned it at length on the administration of the country, and was sent back, after a month's stay, with magnificent gifts... . The ambassadors brought back to the prince of Vientiane a letter from Gia-Long conceived in the following terms: 'Your predecessor Chao-In was my vassal, and my policy with respect to your kingdom has always been marked by gentleness and goodwill. Remain faithful to your duty and show yourself ever humane towards your people, and you will thereby comply with my wishes.' The question of tribute was settled. It was to be paid every three years, and the time of payment set in such a way that the embassy responsible for bringing it might greet the king during the holiday of the Tet." (Cf. Annals of the court of Hue.) 643* 648* 175*

to /161/ detach Luang-Prabang from Bangkok (1). After the Bassac

1. See below, p. 201.

campaign he had sent Chao-Ngo to fortify Oubone. A triple-entrenched camp was built there and recruits trained, supposedly to defend Siam against any attack from inside or outside.

In Vientiane, he governed in the midst of a brilliant court. The city of Setthathirath and Souligna, although fallen from its former splendor, still contained more than ten thousand families and prided itself on its royal /162/ palace (1) and its many pagodas 369 175

1. When the Doudart de Lagree mission visited the city in 1867 the mass of its fallen stones stretched from the Prakeo to the ruins -- which were then still imposing -- of the Wat-Kang. (De Carne, op. cit. /Voyage en Indochine et dans l'empire chinois. Paris, 1872./) See above, p. 122, the account by Father Marini. /172/

whose gilt glittered above the walls of its fortifications. In 1818 /346/

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the Thais-Neua, the Pou-Euns, the Lus and the Youns;

"2. The Khas, and the Khas who are evolving towards types of the first category;

"3. The inhabitants who come from neighboring countries: China, Yunnan, Annam, Cambodia, Siam, Burma."

We shall now give Dr. Lefèvre's version (1):

(1) Dr. Lefèvre, Un voyage au Laos, 1898.

"1. The first inhabitants of the peninsula or true aborigines were the Khas, a nearly savage fold without monuments and, so to speak, without any form of writing, who were driven back into the mountains by the successive invaders of their territory.

"2. The Malays or Chams were the first colonists to come to Indo-China. Little by little they succeeded in forming several principalities, the most important of which was the kingdom of Champa or Tiampa, which included the whole coast from Tourane to Baria.

"3. After the Malay infiltration came the arrival of the Brahmins, who had been driven out of Benares with their leader Pra-Thong. They struggled with the Malays and almost absorbed them in the end. The Brahmins were the first ancestors of the Cambodians.

"4. Under Açoka, emperor of Burma, took place the arrival of the Kmers who came from Pégou and Hansavadi and settled in Cambodia, thereby overshadowing the Brahmin caste.

"5. Tartars came down from the north and leveled all. They were followed by the Thais who came from Mongolia or Setchuen and who spread to Siam, Laos, Burma, Kouang-Si, Kouang-Toung, the north of Tonkin and the island of Haïnan.

"6. To the east, on the coast, are the Annamites, who came from Kouei-Tcheou and occupy all the territory included between the Annamitic Chain and the sea."

Dr. Lefèvre's conclusions are worthy of note, for they were based on documents which are reputed to be authentic. We [134] should, however, add one particular relating to the prehistoric period, that is to say to the epoch of polished stone and the bronze age. At that time there were human beings in the Mékong basin who had the same way of life, the same kind of tools and the same methods of work as our own ancestors in ancient Gaul. In fact, the interesting

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172 collections which have been assembled in Luang-Prabang by M. Massie (1) and by Prince Henri d'Orléans contain tools and weapons

(1) The Massie collection (Pavie mission) is in the museum of Saint-Germain.

of polished stone and bronze which attest the antiquity of the Khas or Laotian aborigines.

174 The autochthonous races, the first occupants of the soil of Indo-China, the ancestors of the folk whom we now call Khas, possessed 563 means of action which were doubtless identical to those of the neighboring peoples (2). But their evolution towards the grouping of

(2) See Appendix, No. XVII.

families into tribes and of tribes into clans was a great deal slower. Their tools and weapons remained at a fixed stage of development, and thus they were subjected to contact with and then the influence and yoke of more intelligent neighbors who were better armed and had a broader and less individualistic social organization.

Who can say, in the absence of any kind of historical monument relating to this remote epoch, and especially after the terrible Tartar invasion, how many crossings, metamorphoses and fundamental transformations these first inhabitants of Laos underwent? Always driven back, fleeing and scattered, they formed what might be called ethnic stratifications which were broken from place to place by numerous faults but the traces of which are clearly visible at the various levels of the mountain slopes and on the plateaus where Kha villages were successively established.

Disseminated, with no bond to unite them, dispersed so as to offer less resistance, speaking different dialects, and deprived of common interests, it may be truly said that the various Kha tribes and clans appear to us in a degenerate light.

000 It would, however, be wrong to suppose that this state of affairs is immutable and incurable. The physical and moral regeneration [135] of these races must not be thought of as a utopian dream, but is essential both as an instrument of domination and as a stimulus to our other subjects in Laos who are descended from the conquering races.

It will be greatly to our interest, and we may even say that it

149: Reinach--235a G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

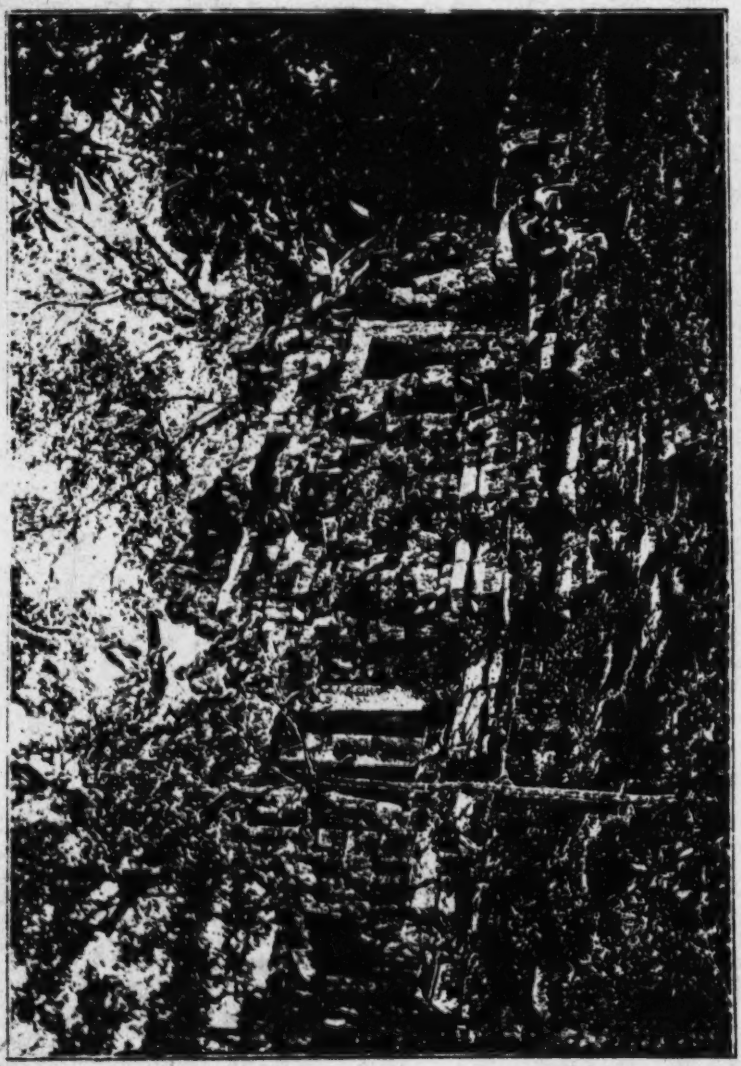

Fig. 82 /p. 319/ Vegetation in the ruins of Hueun-Hin, between Kemmarat and Savannakhet. (Courtesy of M. Blanchet.)

323 The potters' methods and equipment do not differ from those which are in widespread use everywhere.

The method of firing depends on the nature of the article, and firing may be done either in kilns dug out of the clay soil, in the banks of watercourses, or under stacks of rice straw. Wood or rice straw is used to fire the kilns.

In some regions articles are given a shiny black patina resembling graphite by firing them for a second time in paddy husks.

326 778 411 415 Brass-founding. One has only to explore the pagodas of Laos in order to realize that brass-founding used to be held in honor. Religious statues can be found which are sometimes of great [458] weight and usually of quite fine workmanship and taste, taking into account, to be sure, the quite special manner in which they conceive esthetics.

Although the crucibles have not been fired for many long years for casting such large pieces, the industry of brass-founding continues to be exercised by a certain number of specialists who are content with producing religious statuettes, necessities for betel, bells for elephants and livestock, various kinds of vases, cuspidors, etc.

This industry is an extremely ancient one in the land. It was certainly practiced during the Bronze Age, as is attested by the spear-heads, daggers, hatchets and halberds which have been found in northern Laos and which can now be seen in the Saint-Germain museum.

[821 172] It is interesting to note that the inhabitants of Laos attribute a meteoric origin to objects of the Bronze Age, as also to those of the Age of Polished Stone. They believe that these objects fall from the sky when it thunders, and that they are produced by lightning.

The following are some of the methods used by Laotian founders. Casting is always done by the lost wax process.

325 532 Casting statues. On an initial rough clay model, the artist applies a layer of fine, soft and well-pugged clay which he shapes in a more careful manner. Then after covering the statue, which is already much more than a rough draft, with a layer of bees-wax of the proper thickness, he finishes modeling the statue on the wax, inserting all the details and all the ornaments which it is to include. Polishing a bit here, engraving there, setting precious stones or simply glass between the eyelids to represent eyes, and inserting gold lips where the mouth is to be located, he gives the

127 numerous than the solid paths.

For ancient documents are indeed rare. As in Cambodia, one has to admit that the manuscripts of Laos, written in chalk on blackened skins or carved with a stylus on palm leaves, have resisted neither the passage of time nor termites. As for inscriptions, they only appear during [8] the sixth century A.D., and even they are of Khmer origin, the first inscription in Thai writing dating only from A.D. 1292 in the reign of Rama Kamheng of Soukhodaya.

What then remains for us? Fortunately the earth has preserved what the memory of man has forgotten. Prehistoric studies and archeology enable us partially to fill in certain gaps. Let us therefore examine the documents they provide and find out from them what we can learn of the past of the Muong Lao.

ANTECEDENTS OF LAOS. PREHISTORIC PERIOD.

172 The most ancient vestiges of civilization which have so far been found in Laos are located in three well-defined regions:

A) Region of Luang Prabang.

During the year 1940 Mr. Paul Lévy discovered a prehistoric deposit of exceptional importance because of its extent, the abundance of stone material and the composition of this material. This discovery was made in the immediate neighborhood of Luang Prabang (villages of Xieng-Lek, of Phon-Muat and of Pha-Khom). This area has always been inhabited since the time when man's only tools were roughly chipped pebbles. But the paleolithic study of Indochina is interesting in showing that in Indochina, as in the valley of the Somme, man of the most remote prehistoric epochs already lived on the banks of rivers (Lévy). This epoch is characterized by tools of worked stone and by the almost complete absence of pottery. In Indochina this period is usually called the Hoabinian epoch, because the first tools of this type were found in the grottoes of Hoa-binh (Southern Tonkin). We may [9] mention that the human remains found on Hoabinian sites show characteristics which relate them to Australian and Papuan-Melanesian races. But all this is still in an embryonic state and should not lead to any conclusions without observing the greatest prudence.

B) Province of Kham-mouane.

The findings of Madeleine Colani in the grottoes of Mahaxay bring us more reliable information. These natural shelters are undoubtedly necropolises; the furnishings are poor, but they reveal two series of facts.

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1. The neolithic people who left in these places vestiges of their occupation were in the habit of hiding the corpses or skeletons of their relatives in cracks of limestone rocks, with funeral furnishings of many axes.

2. A prehistoric culture similar to that of the coast of central Vietnam is found in this part of Kham-mouane. Marine shells played a large part in this culture. Commerce in shells used as ornaments obliged merchants or buyers to travel hundreds of kilometers through the most difficult and dangerous country. This neolithic civilization therefore crossed the Annamite chain in one direction or the other.

These neolithic people are believed to have been Indonesians.

C. The Bronze Age and the Protohistoric Epoch in Tran-Ninh.

According to legend, the jars of Tran-Ninh were the work of giants, ancestors of the present-day Khas, who used these urns for drinking rice alcohol. They carried the urns under their arms when they went [10] hunting or when they went to war. The cap-shaped stones which are placed in a circle in the mixed funereal fields around certain monolithic remains are said to be the stools on which these giants sat to converse while they drank.

The research of Madeleine Colani has enabled the "mystery of the jars" to be partly elucidated. The discoveries made in several of these jars (remains of calcinated bones, various objects in pottery, glass beads, bronzes and iron tools) leave hardly any doubt as to their funereal destination. The most important object brought to light is a bronze statuette 9 centimeters high representing a man. The industries represented in the funereal furnishings are the polishing of stone, glassware in the form of working beads, metallurgy of bronze and iron. The objects made of bronze and glass seem to have been imported. The iron implements might have been manufactured on the spot, for they are sometimes accompanied by pieces of ore. A careful examination of certain jars shows that they might have been worked with a metal object. However, it has been ascertained that as the number and capacity of these jars diminish, objects of stone become more numerous and vases made of baked clay increase in number. The study of prehistoric immigrations to the Celebes establishes the fact that a nation of stone cutters was followed by one of potters. The former made large, more or less cylindrical, monolithic urns, while the latter made earthenware vases for the ashes of their dead. Would similar facts apply to Tran-Ninh?

172 A considerable agglomeration of human remains was found in the neighborhood of the burial places. One can state with certainty that the area of the Jars, with innumerable funereal monoliths accompanied by rich furnishings, was the center of a social organization which was [11] well constructed with a well-organized hierarchy. That the food for so many people necessitated a large amount of agriculture cannot be disputed. Without doubt, cereals were then cultivated in this region. The peasants were also breeders, for a quasi-sedentary army of men cannot be fed by the products of hunting. As for fishing, it is out of the question due to the hydrography of the country. The funereal furnishings are those of a people who live from working the land. Besides, the present-day peasants of the region of Ban-Ang or of the former aerodrome of Lat-Sen often dig up scattered prehistoric pieces in greater or lesser quantity. Judging from the iron implements unearthed, it can be said that there were two modes of life at the time of the builders of monoliths: that of the mountain people of the forests, who lived in the manner of the present-day Khas and Meos, using the rai method of agriculture; and that of the plains people, assembled from the plain of the Jars, who had cleared the land and cultivated it perhaps by ploughing.

These inhabitants had intercourse with the outside. The two fragments of road which go from this central plain, the one towards Luang Prabang, the other towards Borikan, are strewn at intervals and along the mountain passes with small fields of urns or simply with cemeteries of funeral stones. These routes must have been traveled by caravans of salt merchants. One must not lose sight of the fact that the principal economic activity of prehistoric times was the commerce in this product, and we remind the reader that the whole country east of Tran-Ninh is very rich in rock-salt.

174 To summarize, judging from their workmanship, the megaliths already belong to the age of metals, that is to say, to the protohistoric epoch. But whether they are menhirs or monolithic urns, [12] one is in the presence of monuments of funereal purpose, related to the cult of dead ancestors and chiefs.

Again we are faced with an obscure abyss. How many links are missing in this chain of events! However, a dim ray of light is shed on the dawn of the historical period by linguistics, thanks to the study of the onomastic doublets of the ancient name of Luang Prabang: Xieng-T'ong, Xieng-Dong. One is led to admit the existence of exogamic human groups (doubtless Indonesians) most likely attached,

from the linguistic point of view to the Mon-Khmer group, possessing a two-class social system (Lévy). But one must reach the seventh century of the Christian era to arrive at the solid ground of historic realities. 174

HISTORIC PERIOD. THE KHMER INFLUENCE

Just as the countries of the Far East received in their early stages of development the imprint of foreign civilizations--all are aware of their debt to the Graeco-Roman civilization which each one has known how to adapt to its particular genius--so in the same manner Laos has benefited in the beginning from the neighboring civilizations. 171

In the present state of our knowledge (this phrase will recur frequently in our writings, but it is necessary to put "not initiated" in face of the difficulties encountered by the researcher), the traces of this Khmer influence appear only at very different epochs according to the regions studied. Thus, we find them as early as the sixth to eighth centuries up until the thirteenth century of our era in the province of Champassak--moreover there was in this region a large kingdom known as Wen-Tan in the Chinese annals--then from the tenth to the thirteenth century in the neighborhood of Vientiane, and finally from the twelfth to the fourteenth century at Luang Prabang.

[13] The most important monument of Champassak is the Vat-Phou (See appendix). 172

In the province of Savannakhet future explorations in the region of Keng-Kok will probably furnish valuable information. A rapid trip we made through this area revealed sites which had never been mentioned before. Apparently a strong Cham influence occurred in this province, but the question is still too new for one now to reach any conclusions. 171

At Vientiane, the most ancient Khmer vestiges are most probably found in the neighborhood of the pagoda called Vat Si Muong. A magnificent Khmer bust of the thirteenth century, recently discovered a few hundred meters from this pagoda, seems to confirm this hypothesis. But there again the novelty of the problem forbids any hasty conclusion.

The Khmer influences in That Luang, which had been anticipated at the time of the restoration of this monument by the French School of the Far East in 1931, begin to be revealed. The Buddha said to be that of Fertility, which is in the cloister, is no more than the

172 transformation of a Khmer dvarapala (guardian of the gate) into a
171 Buddha of Laos. The pious hands of the faithful have restored this sculpture according to the rules of the artistic canon of Laos by means of limestone mortar. Finally, the discovery at the beginning of the year 1951 of a magnificent Khmer Jaya Buddha of the thirteenth century opens up new horizons on the influence of King Jayavarman VII in this southern part of his empire, although his role in this country was already known to us by the discovery in 1903 at Say Fong of the inscription named "stele of the hospitals" (see appendix: Vientiane).

At Luang Prabang the stele of the 900 Vishnu discovered in 1917 had already shown that Brahmanism [14] had apparently been in vogue here for a short while. When a certain number of Buddhist sculptures of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries were brought to light during the war, the theory had to be revised according to which Buddhism was not introduced into the kingdom of Luang Prabang before the fourteenth century of our era.

175 Thus, it is principally in the thirteenth century that the Khmer empire exerted its maximum influence on the provinces of northern Laos. But, as Mr. Coedès very correctly observes, the thirteenth century found the whole of Eurasia under the hands of the Mongols. Ever since his accession as grand Khan, Kubla Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan and conqueror of China, sought to obtain the oath of vassalage from the foreign sovereigns who were in the habit of giving it to the Chinese T'ang dynasty. Although these same Sino-Mongolian armies were always defeated or only temporarily successful, their attack produced deep repercussions. The most important of these was the advent of the power of the Thais in the basin of the Menam and in Burma with all its results for Cambodia, the principalities of the Mekong and those of the Malay Peninsula.

HISTORICAL LAOS OF THE XIVth CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

The end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries saw the establishment of principalities in the valley of the Menam and their internal struggles. The weakening of the principality of Soukhotai favored the formation of the state of Laos.

Fa Ngoum (1316-1374) reigned from 1353 to 1374. This king was the true founder of the kingdom of Laos. He spent part of his childhood as an exile in Cambodia where he was brought up by a religious scholar of the capital. When he was sixteen years old, King Jayavarmanparamecvara [15] gave him in marriage to his

daughter, Princess Nang Yot Keo. At an indeterminate date which must come between 1340 and 1350, he was given the command of an army destined to reconquer the kingdom of his fathers. According to the Laotian chronicle, the victorious advance of this army enabled Fa Ngoum to declare himself king of Lan Xan. He immediately demanded the submission of all the Thai princes of Mekong. The center of resistance to Fa Ngoum was Phai Nam (spiny bamboos) because of the impenetrable vegetable belt which protected it like veritable ramparts. Fa Ngoum seized it by means of the classical trick of ornamenting missiles with gold and silver, then pretending to retreat and then pouncing on the enemy at the moment when they had scattered to gather the precious metal. In memory of this episode, the town was baptized Vieng Kham which means "circled with gold" and which later became Vientiane, "circled with sandalwood." Fa Ngoum organized his kingdom with force and reigned as a despot. Complaints were made and the king of Cambodia advised him to be moderate. Fa Ngoum then requested that a mission be sent him from Cambodia consisting of religious and lettered men, and of artisans. This mission introduced the orthodox books of Buddhism and a statue of the Buddha (Prabang) which had been presented in the eleventh century to the Khmer sovereign by the king of Ceylon. Prabang thus became the safeguard of the kingdom.

Up until recent years this tradition led one to believe that the introduction of Buddhism into Laos dated from Fa Ngoum. The discovery of a certain number of Buddhist sculptures of Khmer manufacture of the twelfth century A. D., has destroyed this theory (see below: Introduction of Buddhism to Laos).

After a series of wars, Fa Ngoum died in 1373 at the age of fifty-eight. His successor Sam Sen Thai reigned from 1373 to 1416. He kept [16] peace in his kingdom and passed on to his successor a prosperous kingdom, well established and living in peace, and at the same time dreaded by its neighbors.

The fifteenth century saw a succession of sovereigns about whom history has nothing in particular to tell. Let us mention, however, a war with the emperor of Annam. The first part of the sixteenth century passes under the reign of King Phothisarath (1506-1547), a pious Buddhist. One of his most famous actions is the edict against the cult of Phis. Setthathirath came into power in 1548 after a war with the Burmese. His death was followed by a troubled period. The beginning of the seventeenth century is particularly obscure, but in 1637 a great king called Souligna Vongsa (1637-1694) ascended

538 inscriptions, some of which go back to the fourteenth century and are
[172] in the Laotian language. For the earlier period we have seen above that these inscriptions were either in Sanskrit or in Khmer (Cf. Stele of Sayfong, appendix: Vientiane).

Music

533 Laotian songs belong to the field of poetry and are of two kinds:
538 the one consists of poems celebrating the exploits of legendary heroes,
883 transmitted from father to child, from master to pupil, and often expanded by imaginary improvisations; the others embroider the love theme.

[86] Alternate chants are used, particularly in the courts of love. A young girl sings, a boy answers. These songs have become a traditional game whose social function has been forgotten. They consist of a series of questions and answers. Often the questions are even real puzzles or simple guessing questions. By asking each other questions, the young people try to get to know each other.

It seems as if the origin could be found here of what the Indians call the svayamvara which is the choice of the husband by the woman. This custom is very persistent among the white Thai of the Phongtho region.

534 While vocal music is very prevalent in Laos, there exists also instrumental music which should not be neglected. We summarize here the excellent account given by his Highness Tiao Souvanna Phouma on Laotian music.

"There are three kinds of instruments: a) wind (the khouy and the khene), b) string (the So I and the So O), c) percussion (the Nang Nat and the Khong Vong).

The khene consists of a series of thin bamboos of various and decreasing lengths placed side by side in pairs like the flutes of Pan. Usually these are in seven consecutive rows. These bamboos are joined together by two half gourds attached with wax which form the blowing chamber and have a small circular opening to serve as mouthpiece. On the inside, the bamboos are pierced with holes. The most curious thing about the way the khene functions is that several notes are simultaneous and are absolutely continuous.

The khouy is a flute without any keys, generally made of bamboo and giving very clear tones.

The so, violins with two strings, consist of a long carved wooden handle and a sounding box. [87] The latter is a half coconut closed by

173: Deydier --58 H, B-3 (no date) 1952 AM1 Indochina
(ca. 1940) Laotians AM8

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Fig. 1. Field of the Urns at Tran-Ninh (Cl. École Française d'Extrême Orient [French School of the Far East]).